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Encl. 1

COMMENTS ON NIE-26, "Key Problems Affecting US Efforts to
Strengthen the Near East"

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" I regard as valid the four principal conditions outlined in the report which make the region as a whole vulnerable to Soviet pressure and impede US-UK efforts to counteract these pressures. However, it must be recognized that general conditions in the area, such as centuries of bad government; widespread corruption; lack of honesty and moral responsibility; widespread conditions of poverty; unemployment; lack of sanitation; poor housing; the disease ridden condition of the poor; and the social gap between the rich and the poor, all combine to make an almost ideal situation for the growth of Communism. In analyzing why Communism has not made a rapid advance under these conditions, I believe the principal reason is the inertia of the Middle Eastern population, the fact that Communism is a foreign ideology, the inherent antipathy toward any such form of infiltration, and the religious influence, both Moslem and Christian, in this area.

" A fifth condition which I would add to the four given in the report is the instability of the Near Eastern countries, both from the viewpoints of weak military power and consequent lack of defense, lack of confidence by the people in the ability of their governments to govern effectively, a feeling of dependence upon the more or less vacillating policies of the three Western Powers and consequent lack of confidence in what the powers may do, and an inherent instability of character which has developed over centuries of bad rule mentioned above, which has fostered corruption and has deprived the people of any sense of loyalty except to their family, and to a lesser extent to their religious group.

" For any effective cooperation in the Middle East against the Soviet menace, I believe we should place our reliance ninety per cent on Turkey; first because of Turkey's relatively great military

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strength, and because of its determination to resist the USSR. Speaking for Lebanon (and I believe this is to some extent true in the other smaller Near East states), any material help to us in case of a showdown with the USSR is highly doubtful. While Lebanon is Western-oriented, other things being equal, in the event of hostilities it would appear that the first thought in the minds of the people would be "Which side is going to win?" If we look like winners we could expect reasonable cooperation from them. If they come to the conclusion that the USSR is going to win, I believe there would be little hesitation on their part in switching to the other side.

" Under these circumstances it would obviously be unwise to put any considerable amount of military equipment into this country since there would be great risk that it would end by benefiting the enemy. Nevertheless, a small amount of surplus military equipment, either sold to or granted to Lebanon, would give us a great political advantage and would be of minor value to anyone who captured it. At the same time we should probably take reasonable precautions to protect American interests in the Lebanese coastal strip. This might well include some anti-aircraft guns to protect airports and oil installations, as well as some small coast guard craft (Vedettes). The anti-aircraft guns could be readily destroyed if necessary, and the Vedettes withdrawn.

" Paragraph four regarding France should be stated more strongly with regard to Lebanon. French officials in this country seem to think that their Mandate has not ended, and that Lebanon is a private preserve of Paris. They have strong cultural and economic interests, and they continue to attempt to exert political pressure on the Government. They consider the growing strength of the United States in Lebanon as a detriment to the French position, and are becoming more open in their opposition to American cultural, economic and political affairs here. While, as the report states, France has little to contribute, and while its participation might prove a liability, nevertheless it appears that we are committed to the Tripartite Declaration of 1950 to include them in consultations. They attach great weight to being so consulted. I believe they should be consulted, but that does not mean that their ideas need to be accepted by the US and UK.

" On the question of whether Lebanon would accept US troops to be stationed on its soil, I am not quite so optimistic as our

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Military Attaché, whose statement is enclosed. Business and some other interests might welcome this, but I doubt whether, during peace time, it would be easy to obtain agreement from the Lebanese Government to stationing American or any other kind of foreign troops on Lebanese soil. An increasing military threat from Israel or from the USSR might rapidly change this situation.

" On the question of whether putting US troops into this area would or would not act as a deterrent to Soviet aggression, it would appear that such action in countries relatively near to the Soviet Union would increase rather than decrease the likelihood of Soviet aggression. As to Lebanon, which is farther removed and on the Mediterranean, I am frankly uncertain as to what the effect would be. It would probably depend a good deal on the numbers of troops involved and upon the political situation at the moment. However, as above stated, I believe it would be very much worth while to place in Lebanon a small amount of military assistance in order to bolster the country politically."

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